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Opinion

Column: The time is ripe for conservative theater

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This might come as a great surprise to many in the world of the arts, but there are conservative playwrights out there. They live in large cities like Columbus (New York and LA, too) and small towns. They love theater passionately; some even are employed in the entertainment field. But they do not get produced. Sometimes it's because their plays are not yet ready for the stage.

More often, I suspect, is that the message and underlying politics of their plays make them shunned by the keepers of the arts in this country: the left. But the silencing of the conservative voice is not a healthy way for democracy to prosper. Just as the demand that the voices of historically marginalized groups of people be heard so that they may be better accepted, we need the conservative voice in the arts to be similarly understood, to avoid the stereotyping of those on the right. In our disturbingly divided country, the time is ripe for this to happen.

That conservative theater has to struggle to be accepted is by now a truism. With the progressive left monopolizing the arts, conservatives are ironically spurned by those seeking tolerance. One can hardly think of a more marginalized group in theater than conservatives, who find themselves defined by their political adversaries and cannot seem to offer another working definition.

No doubt, the vast majority of theater practitioners would agree with the "definition" offered by Lisa Goldman, the artistic director of the Soho Theatre (London): "What would a right-wing play have to offer? Anti-democracy, misogyny, bigotry, nostalgia of all kinds?" This simplistic sentiment has been echoed incessantly on both sides of the pond and it continues to be the bludgeon by which the theater world keeps conservatives at bay.

So, if we conservatives reject the characterization of our beliefs promulgated by progressives, we need to come up with our own *raison d'être*. We need to produce theater that embraces the existence of a higher being, who sets standards for living; that supports the true law of the land: The U.S. Constitution; that celebrates individuals determining their own fate, with government's sole purpose being to promote liberty and defend our sovereignty; that seeks guidance for our future from the traditions of eras past; and that accepts the idea that the free market is the economic system most likely to promote fairness and equality (as well as democracy).

Note that nowhere does this list require misogyny, homophobia, racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, or any other "isms" and "phobias" regularly applied to the conservative thinker, and it is both race- and gender-neutral.

To date, only one major playwright has embraced conservatism and that is David Mamet, arguably the dean of contemporary American playwrights. It has been a decade since Mamet's much-publicized adoption of conservatism in the *Village Voice* article, "Why I Am No Longer a Brain-Dead Liberal." Mamet's example should make conservative playwrights feel emboldened to submit their pieces, especially to companies where the conservative point of view is welcomed (such as my own Stage Right Theatrics).

If theater is truly to be a forum for social commentary and protest, it only makes sense that the conservative point of view be presented onstage. Like progressives, conservatives take issue with things going on in our society today; why should our protests not be heard?

Conservative artists long for the day when we can define ourselves and present our take on domestic and world events with the same legitimacy and acceptance as that of our left-wing counterparts.

Robert Cooperman is the founder and president of Stage Right Theatrics, which will present the Ohio premiere of Phelim McAleer's play "Ferguson: Truth Matters," which uses the actual transcript in the grand-jury trial of police officer Darren Wilson, who fatally wounded Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. The play offers a more right-wing view of the incident.